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Why and how do we strengthen Technical Assistance and Rural Extension policy?

INSTITUTO
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1. The Technical Assistance and Rural Extension policy and the just transition of agri-food systems



Rural Extension provided by the Government of Bahia (BA). Photo: Ascom/Bahiater

This study examines the perspectives of stakeholders engaged in Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (ATER) on the challenges of implementing the National Technical Assistance Policy (PNATER), as well as current proposals to improve it.

The study assumes that the Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Public Policy (hereafter referred as Technical Assistance) is strategic for promoting an just climate transition in agri-food systems.

In 2021, agri-food systems accounted for 73.7% of Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions, with 56.3% from land-use change, including deforestation, and 33.7% from agriculture and livestock activities.¹ Addressing the climate crisis in Brazil requires transforming both agricultural and livestock production methods, as well as the way the land used for these activities is managed.

Adopting innovative technologies, norms and processes, and access to financing, public policies, and markets that facilitate the adaptation and mitigation of agricultural activities in response to climate change require at least basic training, consultancy, and technical monitoring. Therefore, limited access to these services by some producers hinders their full participation in just transition processes within the agri-food system.

In Brazil, different stakeholders from civil society, private enterprises and the government provide Technical Assistance services through various institutional frameworks and funding sources. Despite these efforts, the existing services fall short in terms of volume, quality, and coordination to combat the climate crisis. Only 18% of family farming areas have access to Technical Assistance, according to the latest agricultural census.² Expanding access is crucial for ensuring that the shift toward healthier, more sustainable, and climate-resilient agri-food systems remains just and socially inclusive.

However, decision-makers rarely prioritize Technical Assistance when acting on themes concerning rural development, changes in production methods, or the impact of the climate crisis on agriculture in Brazil. Transition strategies aimed at helping the agricultural sector to adapt and mitigate the climate crisis, such as transition plans and climate finance policies, do not include specific measures to broaden access to and improve the quality of Technical Assistance, either as a state public policy or as a service offered by other stakeholders.

¹ SEEG. *Estimate of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Food Systems in Brazil*. São Paulo: Observatório do Clima, 2023. Available at: <https://oc.eco.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SEEG_alimentares.pdf>.

² Instituto Escolhas. *No agricultural transition without Rural Extension and Advisory Services*. São Paulo: Instituto Escolhas, 2025. ISBN: 978-65-86405-69-9. Available at: https://escolhas.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Onpage_ATER_EN.pdf.

2. The declining reputation of the Brazilian Technical Assistance Policy

Farmer irrigating açai seedlings in Pará (PA). Photo: Marco Santos / Ag. Pará

Public policies are often evaluated by their weight in the federal budget. Thus, PNATER's share in the budget demonstrates its low prestige.

In 2024, several federal agencies³ spent **BRL 253.6 million** on "Subfunction 606 – Rural Extension."⁴ The Brazilian Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Agriculture (MDA), which oversees the PNATER, spent the majority of these resources (222 million, or 88%).⁵

Although the amount paid for Technical Assistance expenses in 2024 accounts for 29% of the total amount spent by MDA that year, this fund is significantly lower than the investments in Technical Assistance made by some States of Brazil.

As a comparison, the Agricultural Research and Technical Assistance Company of the State of Santa Catarina - Empresa de Pesquisa Agropecuária e Extensão Rural de Santa Catarina' (Epagri-SC) spent, in 2024, BRL 557.8 million in varied activities, including research and technical assistance. Agreements with the Federal Government for funds transfer accounted for just 0.5% of Epagri's total net revenue for the same year⁶.

Another example is the Technical Assistance Company of the State of Minas Gerais - Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural do Estado de Minas Gerais (EMATER-MG), which acknowledged BRL 429 million in expenses in 2024. In this case, agreements with the Federal Government for funds transfer accounted for 3.4% of the institution's total revenue in 2024⁷. Although this is not the reality for all State Technical Assistance entities⁸, both entities mentioned above spent significantly more than the Federal Government on Technical Assistance actions in the same year.

It is also possible to verify the relevance of a public policy by observing the stability and continuity of its financial resource investments over time, especially in the face of changes in government. Federal investment in Technical Assistance measures varied between 2017 and 2024, with a sharp drop in 2021 and a slow recovery since 2022. These variations are associated with broader crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and also reflect institutional and governmental changes, such as the extinction of MDA and the creation of the Special Family Farming and Agrarian Development Department (Sead) in 2016, during the Michel Temer administration (2016-2018). MDA was reinstated in 2023, during the Lula administration (2023-2026).

³ Like the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Agriculture (MDA), the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAPA) and the Brazilian National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (the Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária - Incra).

⁴ Classification used by the Brazilian Federal Government within the structure of budgetary functions and sub-functions of the Annual Budget Law (LOA) and the Multi-Year Plan (PPA).

⁵ Information available on the Transparency Portal. Available at: <<https://portal.datatransparencia.gov.br/>>. Accessed on March 9, 2026. The data considers "amounts paid" and "other outstanding sums duly paid" for 2024.

⁶ **Source:** <<https://www.epagri.sc.gov.br/balancosocial/2024/>>. Accessed on February 17, 2026.

⁷ **Source:** <<https://www.emater.mg.gov.br/download.do?id=89466>>. Accessed on February 17, 2026.

⁸ The Agricultural Research and Technical Assistance Company of the State of Goiás - Empresa de Assistência Técnica, Extensão Rural e Pesquisa Agropecuária do Estado de Goiás (EMATER-GO), for example, had expenses of BRL 125.1 million settled in 2024.

Source: <https://goias.gov.br/emater/wp-content/uploads/sites/62/2025/08/Relatorio_de_Gestao_2024.pdf>. Accessed on March 10, 2026.

GRAPH 1

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EXPENDITURES BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT VS. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EXPENDITURES BY STATE PUBLIC ENTITIES IN 2024



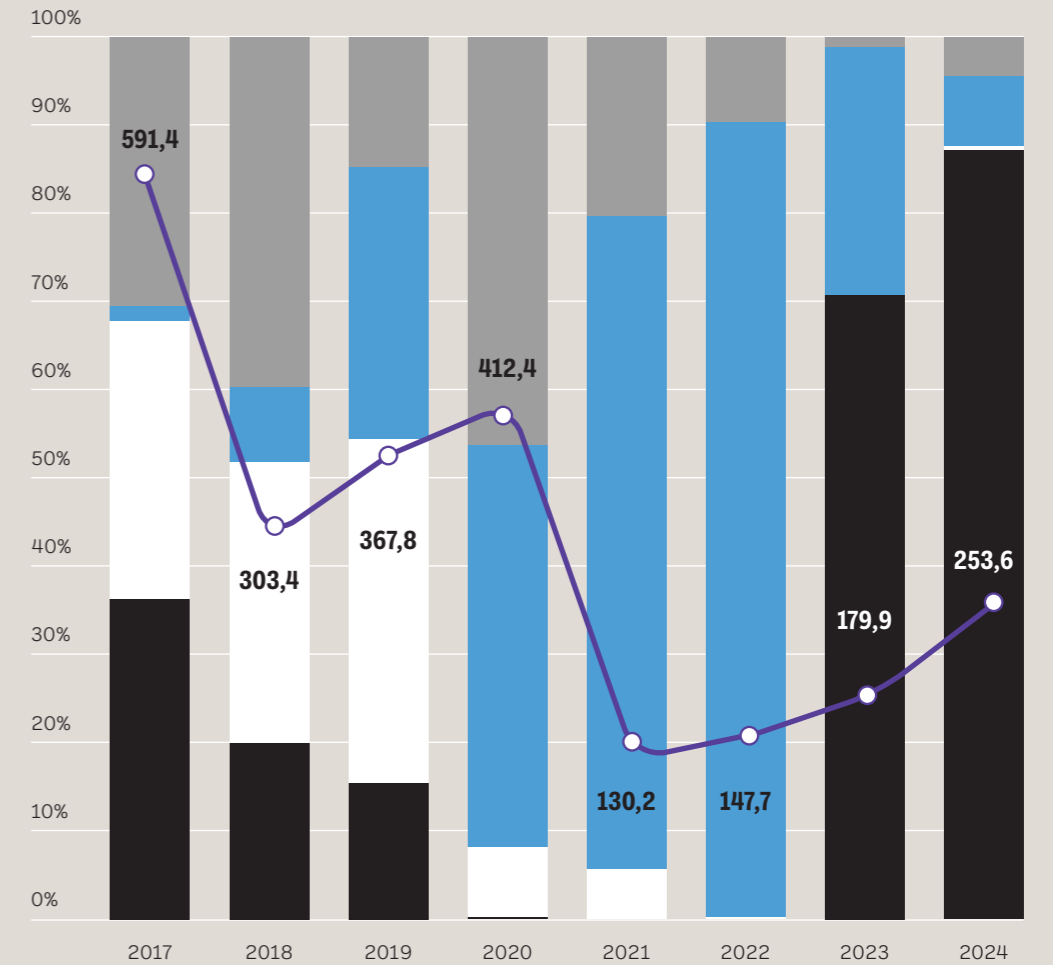
BRAZIL
BRL 253.6
million

EMATER-MG
BRL 429
million

Epagri (SC)
BRL \$ 557.8
million

GRAPH 2

ANNUAL DISTRIBUTION OF SUMS PAID UNDER SUBFUNCTION 606 - TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, BY BUDGETARY UNIT, BETWEEN 2017 AND 2024



Source:
Prepared by the author using data from the Federal Government's Transparency Portal.

Note:
Monetary values restated for inflation by the Broad National Consumer Price Index (IPCA) on December 31, 2024.

Please refer to the study's technical report for the complete methodology at: <https://escolhas.org/estudos-e-publicacoes/>

■ MDA ■ Sead ■ Mapa ■ Incra ○ R\$ = Amount paid in millions of reais (BRL)

Mapa = Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
Sead = Special Family Farming and Agrarian Development Department
MDA = Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Agriculture
Incra = Brazilian National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform

Should the scenario of declining relevance of the National Public Technical Assistance Policy change? Absolutely.



Planting of açaí and other fruit trees in an agroforestry system, in Salvaterra (PA). Photo: Marcelo Camargo/Agência Brasil

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AS A NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY

The main legal framework guiding Technical Assistance actions within the Federal Government is Law No. 12188/2010, which establishes the Brazilian National Technical Assistance Policy for Family Farming and Agrarian Reform (PNATER) and the Brazilian National Technical Assistance Program in Family Farming and Agrarian Reform (PRONATER), both overseen by MDA.

The PNATER defines “Technical Assistance – ATER: a non-formal, continuous education service in rural areas that promotes management, production, processing, and marketing processes for agricultural and non-agricultural activities and services, including agro-extractive, forestry, and artisanal activities.”

The PRONATER, regulated by Decree No. 7215/2010, aims to organize and provide Technical Assistance services for the beneficiary public. PRONATER is the main instrument for implementing the PNATER. Both the law and the decree establish and regulate the contracting, through public calls for proposals, of Technical Assistance services by public or private institutions or organizations, whether aimed for profit or not. Furthermore, they establish the priority for transferring the policy’s financial resources to public and official Technical Assistance entities.

Another relevant federal legal instrument for Technical Assistance is Law No. 12897/2013, which created the Brazilian National Agency for Technical Assistance (ANATER), which is regulated by Decree No. 8252/2014. ANATER is related to the need to provide greater agility, flexibility, and operational capacity to the implementation of PNATER and PRONATER, especially in light of the challenges observed in the execution of public calls for Technical Assistance. To carry out its purposes, ANATER may establish contracts, agreements or other similar instruments with any natural person or legal entity.

In addition to the laws that primarily address Technical Assistance, there is a comprehensive collection of 92 other statutes, decrees, ordinances, policies, programs, plans, and other regulatory instruments that incorporate Technical Assistance within various public policies. Notably, Technical Assistance serves as an instrument for implementing agricultural policy (Law No. 8171/1991) and the National Program for Strengthening Family Farming (Pronaf) (Decree No. 3991/2003)⁹.

While this study primarily examines the implementation of PNATER, some states have their own Technical Assistance laws, such as Bahia (Law No. 12372/2011) and Paraná (Law No. 17447/2012), and have their own agencies offering Technical Assistance, such as the State Companies for Technical Assistance (Empresas Estaduais de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural - EMATERs). Lastly, some municipalities also play a role in coordinating the provision of Technical Assistance to farmers.

⁹ Refer to Instituto Escolhas. Mapping Technical Assistance within the Brazilian federal legal framework. Technical Report. São Paulo: 2025. Available at: <https://escolhas.org/estudos-e-publicacoes/>.

3. Overcoming Resource Constraints

Grape production in Paraná (PR). Photo: Ari Dias/AEN

The study interviewed 32 representatives from different sectors involved in the provision of Technical Assistance in Brazil to identify the challenges associated with the Brazilian Technical Assistance Policy. In addition to the limited and inconsistent federal funding, difficulties related to the legal framework, state capacities, and implementation mechanisms were identified. The main challenges identified are highlighted below.¹⁰

A.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK



Topic	Respondents' insights
The PNATER Scope	There are disagreements among the interviewees regarding changes to the policy's scope. While some stakeholders assess the need to update the PNATER to incorporate contemporary challenges, such as climate change, others believe that the multiplicity of objectives makes the implementation of the policy more complex, hindering monitoring and evaluation and the composition of technical teams with diverse skills.
The PNATER funding mechanisms	The legal framework does not establish automatic mechanisms to finance the policy, thereby ensuring continuous, regular financial resources. As a result, the Technical Assistance budget becomes dependent on annual political decisions, creating instability and limiting its planning and execution capabilities.
The PNATER coordination Mechanisms	The legal framework does not establish explicit coordination mechanisms among federal agencies, the Federal Government, states, and municipalities, which limits integration and coordination among States in the planning and implementation of the PNATER.

¹⁰ Representatives from federal and state governments, Technical Assistance workers' associations, social movements, international organizations, and experts on the subject have been interviewed. Refer to the study's technical report for a complete list of respondents. Available at: <<https://escolhas.org/estudos-e-publicacoes/>>

B. CHALLENGES RELATED TO STATE CAPACITIES



Topic	Respondents' insights
MDA	The Ministry has limited capacity to influence and coordinate national policy, including its relationship with ANATER. There is an accumulation of functions within their team, dependence on consultants and a lack of a structured area for project coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of the Technical Assistance policy.
ANATER	The agency has limited capacity for strategic coordination of national Technical Assistance policy, focusing primarily on contract management. The respondents reported situations in which ANATER's resources were not fully utilized within the appropriate timeframe. There are delays in the selection processes, contract management and resource allocation. The monitoring mechanisms are ineffective and waste field teams' time. Furthermore, the agency has limited human and financial resources.

C. IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS



Topic	Respondents' insights
Public calls	Short-term contracts hinder the offer of continued services, relationship building with target audiences, and long-term planning by implementing entities. Furthermore, it tends to drive actions focused on short-term goals, while homogenizing methodologies and narrowing scopes.
Coordination	There is no effective coordination among ministries, the federal government, states and municipalities, neither between state nor non-state stakeholders. This lack of coordination affects the integration of actions, resources and responsibilities, generates overlapping initiatives and reduces the efficiency of public spending. There are weaknesses in the territorial organization of the provision of public Technical Assistance policy, with little integration between different service providers.
Approaches	There are varying opinions on which approaches are most appropriate for implementing Technical Assistance, including conflicts between productive, multidimensional, territorialized, and digital approaches. Although the current administration of MDA has reinforced agroecology as a guiding principle, respondents believe that approaches rooted in productivism and individualism persist.



D. INEQUALITIES IN SERVICE OFFERING



Topic	Respondents' insights
Unequal access according to socioeconomic profile	Farmers in more vulnerable situations, generally those with smaller properties, tend to face greater difficulties in accessing it. Farmers without regular access to land or without documentation, such as a lack of registration in the Family Farming Registry (CAF), face additional obstacles to accessing the Public Technical Assistance Policy.
Territorial and regional inequalities	There are strong regional and territorial disparities in the provision of Technical Assistance, with less coverage in some regions, such as the North region, and territorial gaps in service, especially in more isolated areas with poor infrastructure.

E. WORKERS AND WORKING CONDITIONS



Topic	Respondents' insights
Shortage of professionals	There is not enough workforce available to meet the existing demand for Technical Assistance.
Public recruitment exams	State public entities are facing low staff turnover due to retirements and lack of public recruitment exams, which overburden teams and reduce service capacity.
Distribution of the workforce	The availability of professionals varies across regions, with fewer extension workers in hard-to-reach areas, especially in some territories in the North. At the same time, technical staff are concentrated in the South and Southeast regions. There are also regional differences in labor costs.
Gender inequalities	Female workers providing Technical Assistance tend to work more in social and organizational areas, while technical activities directly related to agricultural production remain predominantly performed by men.
Working conditions	Low pay, poor infrastructure and logistics, excessive bureaucracy, unrealistic targets, and precarious contracts, especially among outsourced workers.
Professional profile	There is a shortage of professionals with adequate training (specialists) to work in line PNATER and agendas such as agroecology and climate change. There is also a misalignment between technical knowledge and the needs of the territories.
Limitations in training	Training in agricultural fields is mainly geared toward large-scale agriculture and poorly aligned with family farming and agroecology. Furthermore, there are gaps in continuing education, with training often focused on administrative procedures. Although PNATER provides a national training program, its implementation is still limited. There is a lack of systematic diagnoses regarding the professional profile of Technical Assistance workers and their training needs.

F. INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY



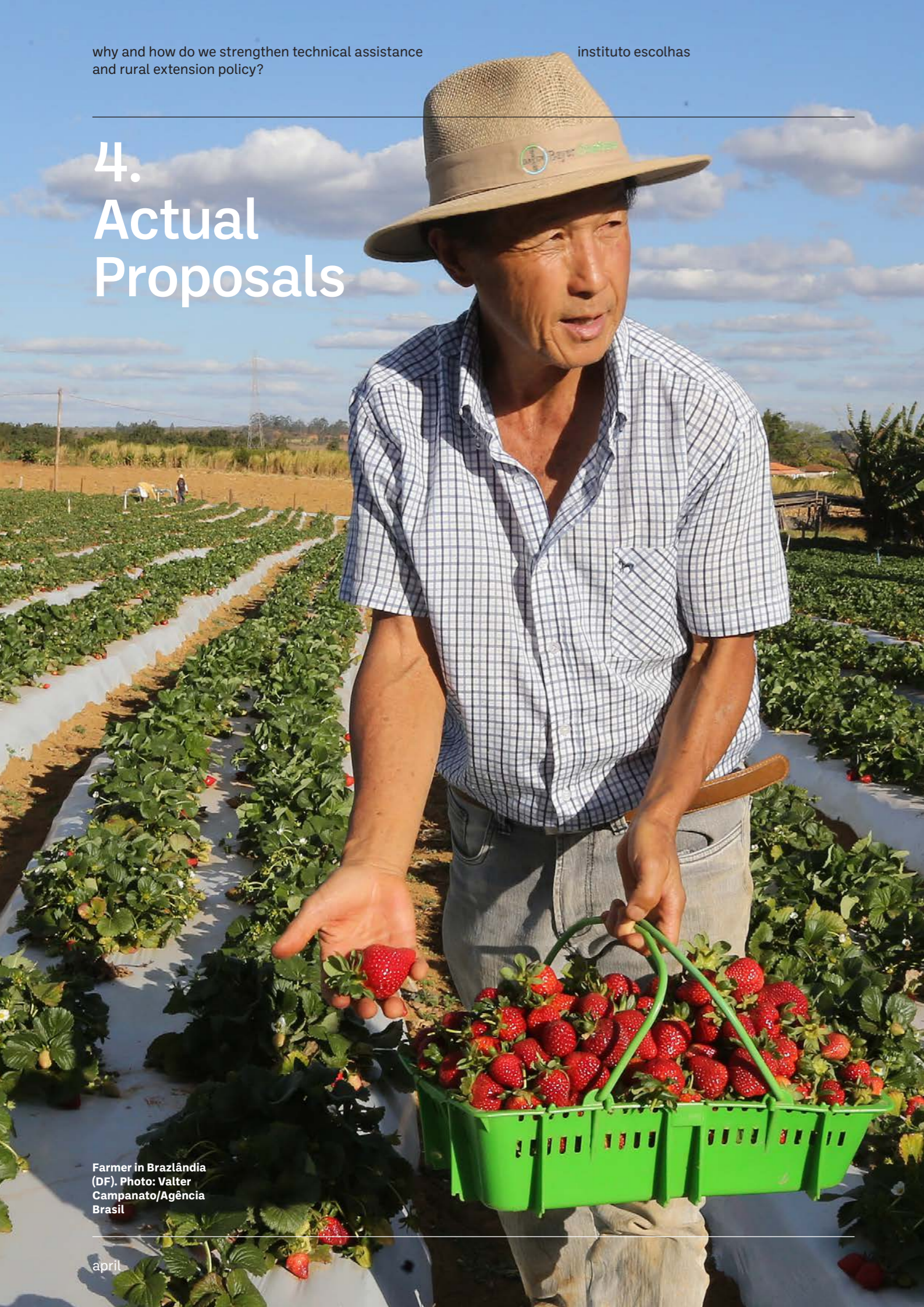
Topic	Respondents' insights
Poor coordination between research, innovation, and technical assistance	There is a structural disconnection between research institutions and the plurality of stakeholders offering Technical Assistance, with few exceptions. Technologies and knowledge produced by institutions such as Embrapa, for example, are not always connected to the implementation of Technical Assistance public policies.
Low investment in innovation	A substantial portion of the resources allocated to state-level Technical Assistance entities are directed toward institutional maintenance and personnel costs, leaving few resources for innovation and technological dissemination. Social innovation experiences, mostly driven by civil society organizations, still receive limited recognition in public policies and official research and innovation systems.
ATER digital is underutilized.	The in-person Technical Assistance model entails excessive costs and significant limitations for scaling up. There is a fantastic opportunity to combine the in-person and digital models. Although connectivity is expanding in rural areas, the incorporation of digital tools is still in its preliminary stages.

G. MONITORING AND EVALUATION



Topic	Respondents' insights
Fragile monitoring and evaluation systems	Monitoring and evaluation of the Technical Assistance policy remain underdeveloped. There is a lack of comprehensive assessments of its impact, with evaluations focusing on the service's coverage, instead of results.
Insufficient and non-comparable data	The policy lacks consolidated databases regarding its implementation and results. When data is collected, a few teams and structures are dedicated to reviewing and using it.

4. Actual Proposals



Farmer in Brazlândia (DF). Photo: Valter Campanato/Agência Brasil

How can the National Public Technical Assistance Policy be enhanced? The study identified responses within the federal executive and legislative branches, which will be presented and discussed below.

THE PROPOSAL OF THE FEDERAL EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Since 2024, MDA has been encouraging discussions with various stakeholders, including civil society organizations working in Technical Assistance, aiming to develop a proposal for the creation of a Unified Technical Assistance System for family farming (SUATER) along with a National Technical Assistance Fund (FUNDATER).

The initiative to implement both proposals came from Congressman Joseildo Ramos (PT-BA), whose office coordinated the drafting of the preliminary version of a bill. The draft was delivered to MDA in January 2024. From then on, the Ministry was responsible for improving the text and conducting public consultations on the proposal. The Instituto Escolhas has provided technical support for the development of the SUATER and FUNDATER proposals since their initial version. Although the bill creating SUATER has not yet been presented to the National Congress, its drafting has been disclosed on official government channels and in institutional speeches¹¹.

The SUATER proposal aims to address primarily two of the main challenges already mentioned by the respondents related to the implementation of the Technical Assistance Policy: the lack of coordination of actions and the absence of resource predictability. To that end, the Federal Government suggests the creation of (i) a governance structure capable of inducing inter-federative agreements, territorial planning, and co-responsibility among entities, with the integration of criteria and information on Technical Assistance actions and their results; and (ii) a funding mechanism for Technical Assistance actions that combines diverse sources and resource predictability.

The first question is: **What is the potential of SUATER's proposal to address the problem of lack of coordination in Technical Assistance actions and public policies?**

Developing a unified national system for technical assistance focused on family farming is a particularly complex governance challenge, since it involves multiple federative levels, a wide diversity of state and non-state stakeholders, and profoundly heterogeneous social and productive contexts.

¹¹ ANATER – National Technical Assistance Agency. *The Technical Assistance (ATER) Conference advocates for the creation of SUATER to strengthen rural development.* Available at: <<https://www.anater.org/conferencia-de-ater-defende-criacao-do-sua-ter-para-fortalecer-desenvolvimento-rural/>>. Accessed on: February 26, 2026.

The Brazilian experience with public systems organized under the logic of a “single system” demonstrates that normative unification and decentralization of execution do not, in themselves, eliminate the challenges of coordination, equity, and effectiveness. Conversely, assessments of existing single systems¹² show that these models produce inherently complex governance arrangements, in which cooperation between levels of government must be continually built, regulated, and sustained through institutional, financial, and political instruments.

For SUATER’s coordination to succeed, it will be necessary to address challenges arising from differing state capacities and territorial inequalities. To that end, the SUATER coordination could incorporate explicit capacity-equalization instruments, combining redistributive funding, differentiated technical support, regional coordination bodies, and institutional learning mechanisms. Without this, SUATER risks perpetuating historical inequalities.

Several studies have already shown that the main threat to decentralized national systems is not excessive territorial diversity, but the absence of institutional mechanisms capable of transforming this diversity into structured cooperation. Addressing the scenario of differing state capacities across the country and territorial inequalities is not a minor problem, but a central condition for the effectiveness of national coordination of Technical Assistance, especially if the system aims to fulfill objectives of social inclusion, sustainability, and rural development. In this scenario, social participation becomes essential and should not be considered secondary. It is necessary to ensure that national, state, territorial, and municipal councils have the effective capacity to influence the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of SUATER.

Research on social policies, territorial development, and public action in Brazil indicates that multilevel coordination—which mobilizes federal, state, and municipal governments and entities, as well as non-state stakeholders—depends less on the formal definition of responsibilities and more on the existence of permanent instances of agreement, capable of processing conflicts, aligning expectations, and adjusting instruments over time. It is important to highlight that, in the case of public policies for Technical Assistance, it is also necessary to combine the institutional pluralism of the stakeholders offering the service (state and non-state) with the strong state capacities for planning, regulation, evaluation, and social control.

A further highly relevant aspect is evidence-based coordination. The Brazilian experience with decentralized public policies and national systems shows that information is not an accessory element, but a

¹² The study investigated bibliographic references on the Unified Health System (SUS), the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS), and the Unified Public Security System (SUSP). Refer to the technical report for more information. Available at: <<https://escolhas.org/estudos-e-publicacoes/>>.

central infrastructure for coordination. The absence of integrated, reliable information systems used systematically compromises coordination among federated entities, weakens planning, and limits institutional learning capacity.

In multilevel systems, coordination is largely about managing information flows. Interoperable information systems are essential for coordinating service networks, aligning responsibilities, and supporting inter-federative agreements. More than a technical requirement, the coordinated use of information constitutes a political and institutional condition for the effective and qualified implementation of SUATER. Without monitoring and evaluation systems geared toward coordination and learning, the risk is that fragmentation, poorly informed decisions, and territorial inequalities will persist, compromising Technical Assistance’s ability to act as a structuring instrument for rural development.

For SUATER to fulfill its potential in addressing the problem of lack of coordination in Technical Assistance actions and public policies, it is necessary to:

- Establish an objective and agreed-upon definition of responsibilities within and between levels of government, and an institutional design that prevents fragmentation while promoting effective coordination among municipal, territorial, state, and federal levels.
- Create inter-federative bodies with actual decision-making and adjustment power;
- Use co-financing as an instrument for coordinating and equalizing inequalities;
- Strengthen state capacities in the most vulnerable territories;
- Clearly define the deliberative powers of councils and collegiate bodies for participation and social control;
- Invest in training, information and technical assistance for representatives of civil society;
- Develop a Brazilian information system that integrates data on service offering, teams, territories, target audiences, methodologies, and results;
- Define process and outcome indicators, compatible with the diversity of Technical Assistance practices and with the objectives of the policy;
- Coordinate monitoring, evaluation, and training strengthens state and social capacities.



Incorporating these lessons from the system design stage can be crucial to avoiding the historical fragmentation of Technical Assistance and advancing the construction of a truly national, federative, and territorially sensitive public policy.

The second question is: **What is the potential of FUNDATER's proposal to address the problem of low volume and the lack of predictability in resource allocation for the Technical Assistance policy?**

The current structure for financing Public Technical Assistance Policies in Brazil is characterized by decentralization, fragmentation, and high financial instability. In Brazil, it is currently based on three main pillars:

- **Federal and State fiscal budget**

Fiscal budgets are the historical basis of the system, but they are heavily concentrated on personnel, leaving few resources for operational costs, travel, monitoring, digital infrastructure, and continuing education.

- **Rural credit**

Rural credit represents the largest financial flow associated with land use in the country. However, their involvement in Technical Assistance is usually limited to preparing technical projects, without ensuring ongoing follow-up and monitoring of socio-environmental outcomes.

- **State funds and policies to combat rural poverty**

Although relevant, these instruments remain split and poorly integrated into the PNATER, with limited reach and small national coordination.

Although these sources play a significant role, they do not provide a reliable national financing system or ensure enough predictability to sustain Technical Assistance as a structuring public policy.

Research conducted in Brazil shows that, in decentralized systems, funding not only guarantees resources but also acts as a central

instrument for federative coordination. In a context of profound inequalities, such as Brazil's, financing rules influence institutional behaviors, priorities, and incentives for cooperation among entities, being a fundamental part of public governance itself. Research indicates that decentralization without mechanisms of financial incentive leads to considerable territorial variation. The effectiveness of national policies depends on subnational autonomy, as well as oversight and direction from the Federal Government. When funding is fragmented or unstable, federative cooperation weakens, and short-term strategies prevail.

The experiences of the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS) and the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS) show that regular transfers, redistributive criteria, and inter-federative agreements have facilitated alignment between national guidelines and local implementation, even amid inequalities. The “fund-to-fund” model, associated with agreed-upon goals and monitoring systems, have strengthened coordination while revealing limitations when not accompanied by technical support and regional planning. By combining predictability, redistribution, and the drive to achieve results, strategic financing encourages integration, cooperation, and institutional learning, as long as it is linked to agreed-upon mechanisms and information systems for decision-making.

This set of lessons indicates that the creation of a regular fund should also be conceived as a structuring axis of the multilevel governance of Technical Assistance. This implies:

- adopting stable and regular co-financing mechanisms that guarantee minimum capacity in the territories;
- incorporating redistributive criteria that are sensitive to regional inequalities;
- allocating part of the resources to inter-federative agreements and territorial planning;
- coordinating funding, information, and technical support, to avoid both project-level fragmentation and recentralization.

Thus, more than answering the question of how much to fund, the challenge for SUATER and FUNDATER is how to fund it. Treating financing as an instrument of federative coordination is essential to transform territorial diversity into structured cooperation, while ensuring that Technical Assistance fulfills its role as a national public policy for rural development.

THE PROPOSALS OF THE FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The study identified and reviewed 105 bills currently under consideration in the Chamber of Deputies¹³ that directly or indirectly mention Technical Assistance from 2007 to 2025. These proposals (and how they address the challenges involved in strengthening Brazil's Technical Assistance Policy) vary their emphasis between a targeted and a comprehensive manner.

Almost half of the proposals under consideration (48 bills) identify Technical Assistance in a more targeted way, such as technical support for a particular program, a contractual requirement, proof, a credit requirement, or a side mention. In practical terms, this pattern tends to reproduce fragmentation by confining Technical Assistance to multiple sectoral policies without necessarily strengthening common rules for coordination, quality, federative agreements, and service maintenance.

The other half of the legislative proposals (57 bills) mobilize Technical Assistance more comprehensively, by proposing the redefinition of concepts, institutional structure, governance, financing, or by integrating it with other public policies. Considering these aspects, the review below focused on the second group of proposals, categorized as “comprehensive” due to their greater relevance.

Part of these bills (18) tend to recognize Technical Assistance primarily as an instrument for coordinating public policies. This data is particularly relevant to the dialogue on the executive branch's proposal to create SUATER, as it reveals a broader understanding of Technical Assistance, integrated with productive, environmental, social, educational, and territorial agendas. At the same time, this predominance suggests a recurring risk: that Technical Assistance is used as a link between multiple policies without necessarily strengthening its own institutional foundations, its operational methods, or its financial sustainability, which can lead to functional overload and the dilution of responsibilities.

In another group of proposals (10 bills), Technical Assistance is recognized as an essential element for promoting rural development, socio-productive inclusion and sustainability. Once again, when strategic valuation lacks explicit operational definitions, it can remain purely declarative, resulting in minimal long-term structural impact.

Two other relevant types of proposals are those dealing with Technical Assistance governance (9 bills) and financing (9 bills). Their existence signal political legitimacy for discussing with the legislative branch regarding the creation of coordination arrangements, co-financing rules, and stable sources of funding in line with the Federal Government's proposal to create SUATER and FUNDATER.

¹³ For more information on the methodology used in this study and on the list of bills identified and reviewed, please access the technical report. Available at: <https://escolhas.org/estudos-e-publicacoes/>.



REGARDING GOVERNANCE, THE PROPOSALS SEEK TO:

- Include Technical Assistance in environmental and territorial governance by integrating it with information, certification, and control systems, and by fostering intersectoral coordination with the environmental, biodiversity, and climate sectors. Examples: Bill No. 1190/2007; Bill No. 1855/2022; Bill No. 4187/2025;
- Create a centralized coordination of Technical Assistance, based on profound transformations in the institutional arrangement (strengthening national coordination, methodological standardization, and creation of mechanisms for monitoring and social control). Examples: Bill No. 7417/2017; Bill No. 4511/2021;

- Integrate the Technical Assistance policy into climate governance to hold it accountable for addressing climate emergencies by coordinating it nationally and connecting it to rural credit systems. Examples: Bill No. 2015/2024; Bill No. 1632/2024; Bill No. 1875/2024.

PROPOSALS THAT ADDRESS THE FINANCING ASPECT, ON THE OTHER HAND, SEEK THE FOLLOWING:

- Create or link stable sources of funding for Technical Assistance. Examples: Bill No. 4370/2020; Bill No. 4369/2020; Bill No. 349/202.
- Centralize the financing of Technical Assistance at the federal level, unifying contracting standards, transfer criteria, and creating a national system with co-financing rules. Examples: Bill No. 7417/2017; Bill No. 4511/2021.
- Establish financing through rural credit. Compensation for technical services related to financial operations. Examples: Bill No. 1306/2022; Bill No. 2402/2024; Bill No. 5069/2025.
- Establish indirect financing through integration with larger programs. The funding is not exclusively aimed at Technical Assistance, but it gains stability by becoming a mandatory component of multi-sectoral programs. Examples: Bill No. 4943/2013; Bill No. 4227/2008; Bill No. 2525/2025; Bill No. 5463/2025.
- Establish emergency financing for climate crises. Here, the funding for Technical Assistance is treated as state infrastructure for responding to climate emergencies, with reimbursement guaranteed by the emergency budget. Examples: Bill No. 2015/2024; Bill No. 1632/2024; Bill No. 1875/2024.

The bills that seek to establish budgetary earmarking and reliable funding sources for Technical Assistance underscores the principle that funding is not merely supplementary but constitutes an essential prerequisite for the feasibility and effectiveness of policy implementation. The problem is that source stability, by itself, does not ensure effective governance. Frequently, these bills fail to detail territorial allocation criteria, redistributive rules, mechanisms for federative agreements, and the link between spending and objectives and outcomes.



Rainwater harvesting and storage in Quixadá (CE). Photo: Fernando Frazão/ Agência Brasil.

Regarding the bills that propose the federal centralization of Technical Assistance funding and the reconstruction of its national coordination, the concern is that this centralization will not be accompanied by inter-federative agreements, shared responsibility of states and municipalities, clear co-financing rules, and mechanisms that recognize unequal capacities among territories.

On the other hand, the bills that seek to finance Technical Assistance through rural credit and remuneration for technical services may increase service accessibility by integrating Technical Assistance with well-established financial tools. However, there is a risk that this approach could limit Technical Assistance to functioning merely as a “credit project” or reduce it to an occasional service. Furthermore, it can generate distributional bias, favoring those who already have access to credit and leaving behind more vulnerable segments, precisely those that public Technical Assistance intends to prioritize. This can perpetuate inequalities.

Proposals that indirectly fund Technical Assistance by integrating it into larger programs broaden its legitimacy. They can generate resources associated with agendas of higher political priority (environmental, social, productive, territorial and emergency). The risk is that Technical Assistance may be needed across many programs, and as it becomes an all-purpose tool, it fails to develop into a robust policy, lacking a dedicated budget, clear standards, and defined governance.

Finally, proposals aimed at securing emergency funding for Technical Assistance to mitigate climate disasters broaden public and legislative perceptions that Technical Assistance is not only a productive policy but also an instrument for territorial resilience and socioeconomic protection. However, there is a risk of establishing a pattern of “disaster financing,” in which resources are allocated sporadically and lack ongoing continuity.

5. Closing remarks

Cocoa production in Medicilândia (PA). Photo: Pedro Guerreiro / Ag. Pará

The data presented by this and other studies conducted by the Instituto Escolhas¹⁴ show that Technical Assistance is activated by various public policies, projects, and state and non-state actions aimed at farmers. Recognized as an instrument for promoting change, Technical Assistance becomes indispensable in a strategy that seeks not only to facilitate the transition of agri-food systems, but also to advance social inclusion and reduce inequalities.

Although its strategic significance is widely recognized, study data indicate that the national public policy on Technical Assistance faces several challenges: limited and unpredictable resource allocation, institutional instability, fragmented initiatives, and insufficient national coordination, including gaps in the monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

The findings indicate that institutional plurality, as well as the diversity of stakeholders, regions, and goals, increase the challenges to formulate and execute public policies that address family farmers' needs for Technical Assistance services. Furthermore, there is a lack of institutional mechanisms to convert this diversity into coordinated collaboration among various governmental bodies, private-sector participants, and civil society organizations.

This analysis is shared among various decision-makers at the federal level, who have been designing solutions to strengthen the Technical Assistance policy, albeit with differing approaches, all seeking to increase the volume and predictability of resources and to improve the rules for policy coordination and agreement between federative entities and territorial planning.

Concerns about the coordination and financing of the national Technical Assistance policy for family farming

¹⁴ Available at: <https://escolhas.org/estudos-e-publicacoes/>.

are not trivial. They demonstrate that the answer to “how much” should be invested in the national Technical Assistance policy needs to be linked to an answer to “how” those resources will be invested. By prioritizing the “how,” it becomes possible to make Technical Assistance financing an instrument for coordinating policy, while ensuring the effective participation of other ministries, federated entities, and non-state stakeholders.

These are essential elements for the national Technical Assistance policy to be a policy that truly promotes rural development, responding to the urgent challenges of increasing degradation and scarcity of natural resources – such as increased soil degradation and reduced water availability – and to increasing climate uncertainties.

In this context, the Federal Government’s initiative to propose the creation of SUATER and FUNDATER is quite promising, even though it is progressing slowly and has not yet yielded results. As of the end of March 2026, the proposal was put on hold by the government and had not yet been sent to the National Congress.

In an election year, the stakeholders directly interested in strengthening the Public Technical Assistance Policy must demand from candidates at diverse levels of government a commitment to this agenda. The data and reviews on the challenges of Technical Assistance arising from this and other studies, and the existing proposals to address them, can no longer remain on hold, given the urgency demanded by the transition of agri-food systems.



Family Farming
in Benevides (PA).
Photo: Alex Ribeiro/
Ag. Pará

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